

National Solar Tour

by Pamela Burton

The American Solar Energy Society's National Solar Tour opens thousands of homes and buildings throughout the country to the public every year. Demonstrated are renewable energy (RE) and energy efficiency (EE) technologies and practices that support a sustainable energy economy.

Tours show attendees how home and building owners provide their power needs from the sun and wind, save energy from building design and energy-efficient appliances, protect against power outages, and reduce their impact on the environment. Tours are organized through independent groups including ASES chapters, state energy offices, environmental and conservation groups, solar businesses and volunteers.



Sam & Chris Garst's home on the Olympia Solar Tour in 2006

The National Solar Tour is held on the first Saturday of each October, National Energy Awareness Month. On October 7 Solar Washington will participate for the 6th year. Over the years the tour has grown substantially in geographical coverage, number of sites and the number of visitors. In 2001 we started with 4 homes in King County, spreading up I-5 in 2002 with 13 sites, then in 2003 we expanded into Chelan County growing to 55 sites statewide. In 2004 participants in the eastern side of the state increase the tour to 100 sites. Last year we grew to 130 sites - so we have high hopes for this year.

Take this as an invitation to join us if you have a site that you would like to have on this year's tour! Help spread the word to folks you meet who are curious about what it means to be going green. The tour is a great opportunity to find out.

We have just begun to organize our 2006 Tour. Some of the highlights so far include: the Zelonedom Home (Polish for green home) built by Sam and Chris Garst. It will be a highlight of the Olympia tour. Sam & Chris wanted to challenge the bounds of architectural style when they built a home that minimized its footprint by conserving water, producing its own energy, allowing year-round food production and incorporating sustainable products throughout. (picture above.)

The Snohomish County Sustainable Development Task Force (SDTF) is teaming up with Solar Washington to present a scattered-site open house tour of Snohomish County Green Building projects. Both commercial and residential sites will be included. The task force will prepare a tour guide tailored to Snohomish County projects, and identify Built

Green(TM), LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), NW EcoBuilding Guild and Solar Washington sites. Projects will demonstrate various sustainable building practices, such as water-conserving site features, energy efficient design, materials and systems, recycled-content, durable, and locally made materials.

We are thrilled to have sites in Ellensburg on this year's tour. So far we have an active and passive solar home that produces all of its electricity with wind and PV power on a net metering system, and most of its hot water using a Six Rivers Solar hot water system with radiant floor heating. The house was built using foam/cement Rastra block with SIP's for the roof. Extensive drip irrigation was used in the garden.

The Tacoma Tour, organized by the Northwest Solar Group, will feature NWSG member's homes that were part of workshop installations. The Kick-Off Site will be at the home of Doug Edwards. Besides his new PV array, he will have on display the NWSG's demonstration models including sun tracking, solar PV panels wired to an inverter & batteries and a flat plate solar hot water panel with a tank. New sites will be open in Spanaway and Roy, and there will be a home-built Axial Flux Wind Turbine and an example of biodiesel production at a home in Graham.

Seattle City Light's Green Power program now has 35 demonstration sites and we will be adding some of those to this year's Seattle tour. Jeremy and I will participate. Our home includes a recycled Thermomax hot water system. Since last year we have remodeled our kitchen by recycling the old cabinets and upgraded the 16 rain barrel collection system. And we want to show you the electric car that we charge with our 6kW photovoltaic system.

How does the tour work? The tour is a self-guided, open house tour. Most sites will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on October 7, and homeowners or docents are available to answer your questions and share with you the green aspects of the home. In a few cases the site will be listed as a "drive by," which means you can see the site from the street but there will not be anyone there to meet with you.

To locate tour site locations on the Solar Washington website, we will have a tour page that you click on. You will see a list of tours broken down by regions that are usually defined by county or city. Click on each region to find a list of site addresses. You can further click on each address to read about the highlights of the site and find a map and directions to the site. We hope to have the tour site up and running by September 1st. ☀